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ABSTRACT

This paper reports on the progress of eight Chicago-based community initiatives designed to redefine social services and broaden social responsibility for the development of children and families. The paper has three sections describing: (1) general background on the children, youth, and families initiative; (2) early lessons from an initiative in progress; and (3) across communities: the roles of the sponsor, the evaluator, and learning. Specific topics covered in these sections include: (1) the purposes and possibilities of an infrastructure and creating a governance entity and process; (2) specific aspects of governance, developing and linking services, and access to services; and (3) the relationships and roles of sponsors within foundations, defining outcomes, balancing objectivity and engagement, process versus outcome evaluation, and the value of the learning process. The paper also includes information on related research from the University of Chicago's Chapin Hall Center for Children and on Chapin Hall's Comprehensive Strategies Forum on Handsnet. (JW)

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CHILDREN, FAMILIES, AND COMMUNITIES:

Early Lessons from A New Approach to Social Services

Joan R. Wynn, Sheila M. Merry, and Patricia G. Berg

American Youth Policy Forum of the Institute for Educational Leadership
Education and Human Services Consortium

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- National Education Association
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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This paper presents observations and early lessons from a community initiative now in its fourth year in eight Chicago-area communities: the Children, Youth, and Families Initiative of the Chicago Community Trust. The Initiative is based on a conceptual framework designed to redefine services and broaden social responsibility for the development of children and families. The framework was developed by researchers from the Chapin Hall Center for Children at the University of Chicago. Chapin Hall remains involved in the Initiative, documenting its implementation in an ongoing process evaluation.

In writing about this experience we want first to acknowledge the investment and leadership of the community residents and other stakeholders participating in the Initiative. Enormous numbers of hours have been spent working to make Initiative communities better places for children and families. The results of this process have been increased cooperation and involvement among stakeholders in communities, a greater sense of opportunity, and the development of new services. From what we have observed, Initiative communities have made substantial progress while encountering inevitable challenges. It has been an enriching, exciting, and at times exasperating, process, and one in which we are pleased to have had a part. We could not have done our documentation work -- to learn from the communities and to share what we are learning -- if the participants in the Initiative had not generously allowed us into their communities and spent time talking with us about the evolution of the Initiative.

We also want to express our gratitude to the Chicago Community Trust, its Board, the Children, Youth, and Families Advisory Committee, and the Initiative staff. Without their courage and dedication, the ideas that form the basis for the Initiative would not have been brought to life, nor would such rich possibilities exist for a fundamental reform in services to children and families in Chicago. Particular appreciation goes to the Trust Initiative staff, led by Marvin Cohen, for their commitment, their keen observations, and their willingness to struggle, share, and learn about the changes that community work requires.

This paper would not have been possible without the Chapin Hall documentation staff, who willingly contributed what they are learning from hours of community meetings, interviews, reading, discussion, and debate about the Initiative and its evolution. These staff members include Steve Baker, Sunil Garg, Kathleen Hall, Renae Ogletree, Layla Suleiman, Sudhir Venkatesh, and Alford Young. Three colleagues made special contributions to this paper: Earl Durham and Joan Costello helped make our observations more accurate and astute, and Prue Brown enhanced our understanding of the role of Initiative sponsors. Susan Campbell and Molly Bartlett, of Chapin Hall's communications staff, have worked with us through several iterations of this paper and have helped to make it immeasurably more lucid.

Our greatest thanks go to Harold Richman for his leadership in articulating and continuing to develop the ideas underlying the Initiative; to Samuel Halperin and Jennifer Cusack of the American Youth Policy Forum for constructive criticism and for offering us the opportunity to write this paper; and to the foundations supporting our formulation of the framework for this Initiative and our efforts to learn as it evolves -- in particular, the Chicago Community Trust, the Lilly Endowment, the Ford Foundation, and an anonymous donor.

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INTRODUCTION

Initiatives to improve the lives of children and families and empower communities are underway across the country. Sponsored primarily by private foundations and increasingly by governments, most focus on the multiple and urgent needs of people in inner-city communities. Some of these initiatives have a primary focus on reforming social services for children and families, others on economic development or physical rebuilding, still others on working across sectors. All recognize the limits of top-down, fragmented approaches.

Overall, these initiatives promote a comprehensive approach to supporting children, families, and communities. This approach is marked by a belief in attending to individuals in the context of family, culture and community, a recognition of the role of neighborhood organizations and informal networks in furthering the development of people and the places in which they live, and collaboration across organizations and systems. Most emphasize local capacity-building, leadership development, and agendas that are community-driven. However, many are attempting to develop community-directed change within reform frameworks proposed by outside policy researchers and funders.

Many of the community-focused reforms underway nationwide are guided by a set of compelling, common-sense ideas about what more supportive communities might look like and what broad changes from current practice would help create them. Because there are no blueprints for implementing these visions, participants are exploring what it takes to rebuild communities as initiatives evolve. The goal -- improving the lives of children, families, and communities -- is important, and the resources being invested, both human and financial, are substantial. By pooling perspectives and knowledge to refine ideas, identify opportunities, and address challenges, we can maximize the chance that these initiatives will succeed.

This paper looks at some of the challenges facing comprehensive community-based initiatives and the early lessons to be drawn from them through the lens of an initiative in Chicago. This lens, the Children, Youth, and Families Initiative sponsored by the Chicago Community Trust, is a ten-year, $30 million effort to enhance the development of children, families, and communities through the creation of community-directed infrastructures of services and supports.

This Initiative shares many characteristics with other comprehensive community-based initiatives, but it has some distinctive features. Chief among these is its *focus on the power of neighborhood resources* -- afterschool programs, youth groups, sports teams, parent support and education programs, and the resources of parks, libraries, museums, community centers, and settlement houses. In developing the framework for the Initiative, Chapin Hall researchers chose to call these resources *primary services* to indicate their potential to serve children and families and a need to redefine social services to include them in a pivotal role.

The Initiative proposes to enhance primary services and to join them as full partners with the traditional *specialized services*--including child welfare, mental health, and juvenile justice--to form a community-governed infrastructure of services. The idea is to reframe and reform social services so that they better serve children and families and so that they are better partners with other settings and sectors critical to enhancing outcomes for children, families, and communities -- including schools, health care, housing, and business.

With colleagues at Chapin Hall, we developed the framework for the Children, Youth, and Families Initiative, launched by the Chicago Community Trust in 1991. During the past four years, we have been documenting the Initiative as it evolves and chronicling the progress of communities in developing community councils, services, mechanisms for access to services, and training.

In the pages that follow, we present some observations from the first four years of the Initiative, focusing on early lessons learned. We describe progress that communities have made as they grapple with the concepts of the Initiative. We share questions raised by the implementation

of the Initiative thus far, and offer observations about what we are learning. We highlight challenges that communities, service providers, funders, and documenters have encountered, and we note strategies being used to address these challenges.

Though the Initiative and our documentation of it are still very much in progress, we hope to contribute to the growing debate and accumulating experience of the increasing number of community initiatives underway and contemplated. In addition, we would very much like to deepen what we are learning by hearing from others about ways in which the experiences we have reported match or are at odds with what they are seeing in their own efforts. In sum we would like to use experience on the ground -- ours and others -- to refine our understanding of what responsive communities for children and families should look like and what it takes to get there.

PART 1: THE CHILDREN, YOUTH, AND FAMILIES INITIATIVE

The Children, Youth, and Families Initiative is a grantmaking program of the Chicago Community Trust now active in eight Chicago-area communities. This section describes the conceptual framework for the Initiative, the communities involved, and the action on the ground.

THE FRAMEWORK

The vision of a community-directed infrastructure of services that inspired the Children, Youth, and Families Initiative is premised on a fundamental shift in policy. The proposed shift is from an *exclusive* focus on curing or preventing problems for some children and families to one that is also concerned with promoting the development of *all* children and the functioning of families.

This shift in policy is critical, given challenges facing children and families. All children today face the challenge of mastering the knowledge and skills required to live successfully in an increasingly complex world. Too many children face additional challenges -- poverty, school failure, family disruption, drugs, social isolation, and violence. The coming-of-age of the baby-boom generation means that children are now, and for the foreseeable future will be, a smaller proportion of the population. At the same time, more children will be poor and minority. This means that today's children will bear a larger share of the responsibility for our society's future, and that many of them will face severe challenges in doing so because of the obstacles often confronting the poor and members of minority groups. Another demographic trend -- the greater percentages of families headed by single parents or two parents who both work outside the home -- suggests that the human and material resources families have to invest in their children are stretched thin.

Against these challenges facing children and families, what is the nature of the services our society provides? Existing social services offer largely fragmented, categorical responses to individual problems. These specialized services, focusing on aspects of dysfunction and difficulty, are usually available only when problems have become chronic or severe. They require that children and families either acknowledge a problem or be identified as having a problem before receiving services. In addition, these specialized services draw their authority from separate bureaucracies -- locating the planning, financing, and control of services outside the community and away from the influence of citizens and service consumers.

Primary services offer children and families a number of benefits not available in specialized services. People turn easily to primary services. Because they are voluntary and do not require that people present a problem or prove eligibility, primary services offer participants a sense of choice and control over the interaction with providers. Through their roots in communities and informal ways of relating to children and parents, primary services are a natural, often enjoyable, resource. Primary services can enhance child development and family life and can provide help in ways that are neither categorical nor stigmatizing. Moreover, primary services can increase the benefit of specialized services that children and parents are using.

We believe that primary services should play a central role in a larger, more purposefully organized system of child and family services. These services should function as part of a coherent infrastructure for children and families in communities, uniting primary services that enhance functioning and development as full partners with specialized services that respond to child and family problems.

Communities are central to creating an infrastructure of services for several reasons. Most families turn first to their communities for sources of enrichment, support, and problem solving. Connections among providers and the people they serve can be created and sustained most easily at the community level. Communities are the most promising jurisdiction for the planning and delivery of services -- allowing for a state role in standard setting, monitoring, and equity concerns -- because services planned and provided locally can be responsive to cultural preferences and values, and can draw most effectively on existing resources.

THE PURPOSES AND POSSIBILITIES OF AN INFRASTRUCTURE

A central aim of the Children, Youth, and Families Initiative is to broaden an active sense of social responsibility for the healthy development of children and the functioning of families. This goal, with others, is to be accomplished through the creation of a community-defined infrastructure of services for children and families that will:

- Create a planning and governance group to build on local priorities and resources. Members of this broadly representative community council -- including adult and youth residents, leaders of community organizations and institutions, and service providers -- should be selected for their demonstrated concern for the community
- Strengthen and expand primary services and create links between primary and specialized services, so that they work together in the interest of children and families
- Enhance access to all services for children and families
- Provide training for staff and volunteers, so that they can work effectively in this infrastructure

Realizing this vision requires that the community council identify the community's priorities for children and families and that it create and sustain an infrastructure of services that reflects these priorities. It also requires that this group advance to a position of stature within the community and with institutions outside the community sufficient to effectively influence policy, enlist financial support, and secure the involvement of public and private agencies. Finally, it requires that specialized services be reformed so that they can be more responsive and can more effectively connect with primary services and each other.[1]

ON THE GROUND

THE INITIATIVE COMMUNITIES

Each of the eight Initiative communities is distinct, having its own blend of geographic, economic, and racial or ethnic characteristics. Overall, the population in the Initiative communities ranges from 40,000 in the smallest to over 167,000 in the largest. Seven of the eight communities are located in the city, and almost all of these are combatting problems typical of inner-city neighborhoods, including poverty, high rates of un- and underemployment, substandard housing, and crime. (The boxes on pages 5-12 describe each community and its Initiative activities.)

Three communities are almost exclusively African American. Two of these have large concentrations of high-rise public housing developments, and one of them is home to the largest concentration of public housing in the United States. In this community, over 60 percent of the population lives below the poverty level; the median income is less than $7,000.

Two additional communities are predominantly Latino, the residents primarily of Mexican descent in one and Mexican and Puerto Rican in the other. A third of the population in one of these communities and a quarter in the other live below the poverty level. These communities are "ports of entry" for many Latino families. Both communities are home to strong, longstanding community organizations. Recent gentrification has introduced increased economic diversity and some degree of economic distrust in both.

The populations of another two communities are extremely diverse. The first of these communities, once considered a white enclave, today has a population in which less than half of the residents are white. Residents now include African Americans, whites, Latinos, and Arab Americans. The population of the second community is among the most diverse in Chicago, including African

[1] Chapin Hall has developed an approach to the reform of specialized services that would facilitate a complementary relationship between the primary and specialized service sectors. This approach, focusing initially on child welfare, applies to all human services affecting children. See Rethinking Child Welfare Services in Illinois, listed at the end of this paper under "Related Chapin Hall Research."

Americans, whites, Latinos, Asian Americans, and Native Americans, among others. One-third to one-half of the residents in these communities are young, age 24 and under (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1990).

Finally, one community is located outside the city. The suburban village includes about 33,000 people who are generally affluent. Unincorporated areas adjacent to the village are home to another several thousand low- to moderate-income people who use village schools and other services and are included in the Initiative.

Like many suburban communities, the village is beginning to experience the urbanization of the suburbs and to face some of the problems that exist in urban communities--including tensions among people of different racial, ethnic, and income groups, problems in the schools, and vandalism. Like city communities, suburban communities may experience a mismatch between services offered and services needed by children and families.

Access to services can be an important issue in suburbs as well as cities, because of the distances to be covered and the limited availability of public transportation. The suburban community provides an understanding of how the ideas that inform the Initiative work in a community where a range of primary and specialized services already exists. Appropriately, Initiative funding in this community is confined to support for planning and not for additional services.

EARLY ACTIONS OF THE SPONSOR AND THE COMMUNITIES LAUNCHING THE INITIATIVE

The Children, Youth, and Families Initiative was launched in July 1991, when the Chicago Community Trust issued an announcement describing the Initiative, including the service reform framework developed by Chapin Hall, the kinds of efforts the Trust would fund, and the process for initiating discussion with the Trust about possible support. The Trust also held 13 community forums to which a broad range of organizations and individuals with an interest in children and families and a stake in the community were invited.

The criteria for selecting Initiative communities included geographical diversity, and, either within or across communities, racial and ethnic diversity. Most of the communities were to be low-income. The selection process also favored communities with some evidence of past cooperation among community leaders and organizations. Finally, on the assumption that community revitalization will also depend on building the physical and economic infrastructure, the Initiative resources were to be focused on communities in

Great Diversity

This is one of the most diverse communities in the United States. Its nearly 125,000 residents represent over 60 separate cultures and speak over 50 languages. The diversity is not only between but within racial and ethnic groups. The community has a large elderly population and the highest concentration of former mental hospital patients in Illinois. Over 80 percent of area residents live in rental housing, and nearly 75 percent of the area's children live in low-income families.

THE INITIATIVE

Planning and Governance. Begun by a community-based umbrella organization with a membership of about 60 community organizations, churches, business and civic groups, ethnic associations, schools and service providers, the Initiative planning process included participation by over 230 people. A subcommittee of this group took the lead in Initiative planning. Energy is now turning to development of a governance mechanism for the Initiative. This attention to governance was motivated by pressure from the sponsor and by the need to reach beyond the organization's own membership in representing the community.

Services. A number of programs identified in the strategic planning process have been funded: a joint effort by a local city college and two alternative education centers to provide educational support, entrepreneurial opportunities, and career planning and placement for community youth; a network of small afterschool programs designed to increase their number and quality through joint recruitment and training, shared resources, and unified advocacy; a teen center designed to attract youth of diverse backgrounds through activities such as arts, recreation, tutoring, cultural events to celebrate ethnic diversity, and projects to encourage participants to work in integrated groups toward a common goal.

which planning for housing and economic development was either underway or contemplated.

As communities came forward, the Trust, applying these criteria, selected the eight communities now active in the Initiative. To date, the Trust has made over $10 million in grants for developing and supporting community councils and for creating new services ranging from teen centers to transportation services. In most communities, the effort began with the creation of a community council to plan and oversee development of a service infrastructure. Generally, proposals for services are reviewed and endorsed by this community council before they are submitted to the foundation. Although the Trust's involvement in the communities' proposal development process has varied from grant to grant, Trust staff are interested in being involved in the earliest stages, before substantial efforts to express program concepts in a written request. Trust staff see the grant review and negotiation process as central to moving community grantees toward the Initiative's framework for reform. Trust staff often negotiate with prospective grantees about reshaping their proposals, addressing budget and management concerns as well as the proposal's incorporation of key elements of the Initiative.

After the Trust staff review, the proposal and accompanying staff recommendations are presented to the Children, Youth, and Families Advisory Committee, a group of business, civic, community, and professional leaders recruited to help the Trust deepen its knowledge of social services and assist with establishing policies for the Initiative. From the advisory committee, proposals with staff and committee recommendations go to the Trust board of directors for decisions on funding at quarterly meetings.

CREATING A GOVERNANCE ENTITY AND PROCESS

The first challenge for many communities has been to develop processes and structures for community planning and governance. A number of community characteristics have been significant in shaping the start of the Initiative in each community -- the community's economic viability, the strength and scope of local leadership, the existing network of service providers and their history of cooperation, and the presence of other organiz-

Poverty Amid Affluence

This community is located on prime real estate, a few minutes from Lake Michigan as well as from the Loop, and is surrounded by affluent neighborhoods. Most of the community's population -- almost entirely African American -- lives in poverty and in a large public housing development. Nearly all residents of the development receive public aid, and many of the children are born to single mothers. Gang activities, killings, and drug abuse have been rampant, amid the relative safety of the surrounding area.

THE INITIATIVE

Planning and Governance. Almost five years ago, a group of residents, community agencies, and churches formed a coalition to plan for redevelopment of the area. This group tackled a variety of problems including housing, economic development and jobs, and the concern of public housing residents that gentrification already underway would force them from the area. The group of some 60 organizations and individuals spawned several committees to focus on community problems.

Participation in the Initiative provides a vehicle through which they may be able to advance some of the community's priorities they had targeted. The coalition's Social Service Committee reviews proposals from community organizations targeting service priorities established in the coalition's strategic plan. Once the Social Services Committee reviews and approves the Initiative proposals, they go to the full Governing Board of 81 members for approval, and are then submitted to the sponsor.

Services. The community has developed a year-round sports league, supported by volunteer coaches, that is committed to involving youth who are both physically and emotionally challenged through training and referrals provided by a large local rehabilitation center and local mental health centers; a week-long camping program for local children and youth combined with a "hands-on" training program for workers from local youth-serving agencies; two programs that target esteem-building and leadership development among local youth, focusing on conflict resolution, coping skills, and communication skills; and a collaboration with local professional performing arts and visual arts studios to involve 400 youth in a wide variety of opportunities for artistic expression.

ing efforts. In some communities, an existing coalition assumed oversight of the planning and governance process. The Initiative's first phase was accelerated in these communities in part because potential members of a community council were more readily identified and had often developed ways of working together.

- *The directors of ten established neighborhood organizations in one community had been meeting together for about two years to share experiences and find ways of supporting each other. In response to the Initiative, the group developed a plan to link the services of their ten agencies, both expanding their services and improving access to them.*

- *In another community, an existing umbrella organization has spearheaded Initiative planning. Established in the 1970s, its members include representatives of churches, business and civic groups, ethnic associations, schools, and service agencies. The preexisting structure of the umbrella organization has been used for planning and oversight of the Initiative.*

- *The Initiative planning group in the suburban community, which includes representatives of all organizations that serve children and families, was established over two-and-a-half years ago in response to a wave of youth vandalism and an increase in problems in the schools. This group's involvement with the Initiative was a way to enhance the process they had already begun.*

In other communities, the Initiative faced early and formidable challenges in getting key individuals, groups, and coalitions to talk to each other. Issues of representation, procedure, trust and control took enormous time and energy, and they continue to influence deliberations.

Both of these approaches -- creating new collaborative groups or starting with existing coalitions -- have advantages and limitations. On the one hand, the process of developing services has taken longer and proceeded more unevenly in the communities building a newly formed collaborative group to oversee the Initiative. On the other hand, several of the communities in which plan-

Port of Entry

This community is home to Latinos, primarily of Mexican descent, and to low-income whites. Many of the Latinos have lived in the city for years; others have moved more recently from Mexico. As testimony to its prior economic affluence, the area has many large, spacious homes and apartment buildings that have been converted to apartments and rooming houses. Over 60 percent of the community receives public aid. Gang and drug problems are endemic.

THE INITIATIVE

Planning and Governance. The directors of ten established agencies, including settlement houses, day care and family support programs, health care and dental services, had been meeting together for two years prior to responding to the Initiative announcement. The group felt that participation in the Initiative could support their efforts to develop a common vision for the area, one that would link the services of their ten agencies, expand services, and improve access to them. The ten agency directors meet monthly as a Steering Committee and have designated a board chair and co-chair. There are three standing committees: program, development, and evaluation. Smaller work groups are created on an as-needed basis. The larger group is creating three advisory committees, one of youth, one of parents, and one of organizations, residents, and community leaders. The Steering Committee will incorporate new members from these advisory groups.

Services. Through the Initiative, this group is creating a collaborative teen program providing a wide variety of primary and specialized services in ten-plus sites throughout the community. These sites are linked through a bus system designed to transport youth across gang boundaries, providing access to the full range of available opportunities. Primary services include cooking, urban discovery, boxing, basketball, karate, art, dancing, drama, tutoring and other educational support, and a youth entrepreneurship program. These services are enhanced by specialized staff who provide health screening and education, dental services, group, family, and individual counseling, and community resource expertise. The participating agencies are unified through shared staff training, monthly staff meetings and newsletters, shared recruitment and intake, and jointly sponsored community forums on issues of interest to parents.

ning began through existing coalitions, and the planning and delivery of services moved more quickly, now face substantial challenges in broadening participation beyond the original group.

Overall, the Initiative community councils have gathered a diverse array of participants to define community priorities. Most communities have created community councils made up of committed members. These groups range in size from nine to one hundred participants and most meet monthly. The creation of these groups, the processes for operating they have developed, and the services being provided through their efforts represent a significant set of achievements. The community councils are bringing together individuals and organizations -- many for the first time, often overcoming rivalries and resentments -- to address issues central to improving the lives of children and families.

Mixed Latino Population

This is a largely working class Latino community, but one that reflects ethnic and economic diversity in several forms: there are tensions between the two major Latino groups -- Mexican and Puerto Rican; the population also includes moderate-income whites and, at the economic extremes, both a significant number of public aid recipients on the one hand and pockets of affluence on the other. Overall, the community has a strong sense of identity and a history of successful community organizing and institutional cooperation, though issues such as gentrification can have a divisive effect.

THE INITIATIVE

Planning and Governance. This community's efforts to organize around the Initiative were initially challenged by false starts and tensions both among community groups and between community groups and the sponsor. These tensions included the relative role of churches and social service providers in the planning and governance process and the selection of a local organization, acceptable to both the community and the sponsor, as the source of administrative support for the development of collaborative program proposals. However, a group of 12 organizations including churches and service providers successfully formed an Initiative collaborative. The collaborative's Advisory Board meets monthly and three standing committees meet as needed. This collaborative is in the process of becoming a special project of a larger, previously existing neighborhood association. Independent of the Initiative, the association developed a holistic plan for community building. As part of this plan, the Initiative collaborative will have special responsibility for organizing a community youth council of all organizations serving youth and facilitating the development of relationships among them.

Services. This community has established a collaboration among local churches and primary and specialized service providers, as well as a local public school, to provide a network of afterschool programs. Primary services include basketball, volleyball, swimming, tutoring, arts, and other recreation programs. Specialized providers offer services in gang intervention, parent education, and mental health. Staff from collaborating agencies are involved in joint training, service planning, and staff and facilities sharing. A commonly owned van provides transportation to the various program sites.

PART 2: EARLY LESSONS FROM AN INITIATIVE IN PROGRESS

In the four years since the Children, Youth, and Families Initiative was launched, participants in the eight communities have dealt with challenges, raised questions, and experienced progress. The following sections, derived from our Initiative documentation, draw preliminary lessons in the hope that these lessons will be useful to others now engaged or interested in comprehensive community-based initiatives. Governance is a primary topic because it is fundamental to an initiative that is to be *community-directed*. Moreover, at the current stage of this initiative, governance has occupied the lion's share of most communities' time and attention. The remainder of Part 2 covers developing and linking primary and specialized services, access to services, and training for staff and volunteers.

GOVERNANCE

The Children, Youth, and Families Initiative was designed to be a catalyst for community-directed change within a framework proposed by Initiative sponsors. This Initiative, like some others, gives a central role in achieving community-directed change to the development of a community-based governance entity and process. At present there is no single community entity or process responsible for planning and overseeing the delivery of social services. Services for children and families have grown up piecemeal, and it is no simple challenge to create mechanisms that enable them to work together effectively. It is not clear whether or how a governing group can exert influence over all child and family services, both those funded directly through its efforts and those that are not. This is one of a number of issues being explored through the Initiative.

WHAT IS THE COMMUNITY COUNCIL'S AUTHORITY?

The Initiative's intent is that the community council develop the authority needed to create and sustain an infrastructure of services. Initially,

Long Disinvestment

African Americans began to move into this community in the 1960s, at which time it was virtually abandoned by its earlier European-American residents. Its population is now 96 percent African American. The area has a history of racial conflict dating from the period of transition. Blocks of abandoned buildings stand as testimony to urban decay. One of Chicago's poorest neighborhoods, it is struggling to find a way to participate in the prosperity that some areas of the city have enjoyed over the past few decades.

THE INITIATIVE

Planning and Governance. The council in this community survived a stormy beginning, principally involving competition for the Initiative between two existing coalitions – one of human service providers, one of churches – and the sponsor's relationship with each. In the end, a core of 22 participants including representatives of both groups developed a strategic plan reflecting Initiative aims. The process involved most of the major organizations in the community as well as many residents, the latter through focus groups designed to collect information on the interests of youth and families.

This board has elected officers, hired a full-time project director, and created five board committees (Finance, Program, Public Relations, Personnel, and By-Laws). These committees are made up of community volunteers and include both service providers and others representing community organizations and religious institutions. The group, which has a membership of over 200 agencies, meets quarterly to elect officers as well as vote on directions for the Initiative. A Steering Committee of 11 members, most of whom are service providers, has kept this collaboration moving forward.

Services. This community has consciously chosen to focus its energies on system planning rather than program development. As a result, while the leadership core has begun to solicit additional program proposals from the community, only one program, a community-wide arts/cultural partnership, has been funded to date. This project involves a partnership between local artists and both primary and specialized service providers to make the arts accessible to young people of all abilities. Courses to be offered in 16 sites through the community include theater, dance, choir, African rhythms, clothing design, photography, and video. Specific efforts are being made to reach out to youth with special needs and at least one course is being taught by a disabled artist.

the authority of the community council is conferred on it in part by the community's regard for the individuals and organizations in the council. The community council's designation as the vehicle for Initiative planning and decisionmaking and its access to Initiative funds give it some further measure of legitimacy, and the value of the services expanded or created through council efforts can add to the group's stature in the short term. As it is playing out, community councils are struggling with how to define and reinforce their current authority and how to think about what their authority can and should be long term. Their efforts reflect a number of evolving strategies.

The first of these strategies is fundamental to the Initiative. It is based on the premise that, under the aegis of community councils, primary and specialized service providers who work together as parts of an infrastructure can do more to meet the interests and needs of children and families than they could working separately. One of the purposes of the Initiative is to explore the extent to which this principle -- the benefits of joining forces--can overcome the distrust and competing interests that exist among provider organizations, enabling them to offer better and more accessible services.

A second strategy for establishing authority is to have the community council become broadly representative of the community with the capacity to recognize and advocate for the diversity of the community's children and families. Deliberations taking into account the range of community interests and achieving consensus or compromise should reinforce the group's authority.

Sustaining an infrastructure of services for the long term will have to involve access to public sector money, which now funds a substantial proportion of child and family services. A third strategy, therefore, is to secure more flexible allocation of the public sector funds spent for children and families in the community. In effect, the community council would reinforce its authority through the control of resources, and through its capacity to make allocation decisions about the

Concentrated Public Housing

Long seen as a white, working-class bastion, this area is an increasingly diverse community including Latino, white, Arab, and African American residents of low to moderate income. Racial tensions have been high in this area, but there is growing momentum toward stabilizing the community through economic redevelopment and efforts to address issues of racial and ethnic diversity.

THE INITIATIVE

Planning and Governance. Creation of the Initiative collaborative in this community was spearheaded by three organizations with long ties to the community -- a community congress, a coalition of local churches in a single faith, and a YMCA. The planning process included systematic information gathering about youth services, both public and private, as well as assessments of needs from a cross section of service providers, educators, religious and other community leaders, and local residents. Planning included approximately 20 focus groups attended by hundreds of people representing the major organizations and institutions in the community. From analysis of these data, the community council developed a five-year strategic plan to guide subsequent activities.

A leadership core reflecting the ethnic-racial composition of the community was formalized into a 23-member governing board with representation of youth and adults from each area of the community as well as key racial and ethnic groups. They are involved in board development training, including work to create a meaningful role for youth on the board; a part-time staff position was expanded to full-time for this task. The group has secured 501(c)(3) status.

Services. The collaborative targeted the development of teen centers as a key community need. Three have been established in various parts of the community, through collaborative efforts on the part of both small grassroots organizations and larger, established primary service agencies. These centers offer programming that includes sports and recreation, tutoring, scouting, and counseling. Through a partnership with local businesses and the teen centers, the collaborative also developed a youth training and employment program. A juvenile diversion project, designed to keep first-time offenders out of the corrections system by finding them appropriate resources and supports in the community, was also launched.

use of funds -- for child welfare or juvenile justice, for example -- in ways that meet community priorities while addressing legally mandated public goals. This longer-term resource reallocation role has thus far taken a back seat to other complex and more immediate concerns -- community council membership, policies for proposal review, and mechanisms for accountability for services created through the planning process.

These are the strategies dealing with community council authority that have been considered by the councils to date. An important part of learning from the Initiative will be the identification of additional strategies and assessments of their effectiveness.

WHO IS REPRESENTED BY THE COMMUNITY COUNCIL?

This Initiative aims to create an infrastructure that is more than a network of existing services. The infrastructure is meant to encompass existing or enhanced services as well as new services, all of these responsive to the diverse interests of children and families. Moreover, these services are intended to evolve in response to changes in the community and its priorities over time. This makes it especially important that community council members have legitimacy derived from demonstrated stewardship of the community. Broad community representation may be critical in securing access to funds, particularly the major public sector resources, and in making allocation decisions about the use of funds that accurately reflect community priorities. While it is important to engage service providers in generating an infrastructure, their disciplinary orientations and organizational interests should be filtered through a decisionmaking process in which community interests predominate.

Creating a representative governing group gives rise to challenging questions. What diversity of membership is needed to establish the community council's legitimacy in representing a community? And who are members expected to represent in any case? If representatives of organiza-

New Diversity

This community is home to the largest concentration of public housing in the country. The area leads the city in homicides, and is the home base for many of Chicago's street gangs. Ninety-nine percent of the area's residents are African American, and 63 percent live below the poverty level. Because of the concentration of profound problems, the community has attracted the attention of numerous other initiative sponsors. Many residents are pleased about the activity in the community, hoping it will not only bring tangible benefits but also energize residents; others are skeptical, however, seeing the multiple programs largely as efforts to coordinate and streamline, rather than expand, resources and services.

THE INITIATIVE

Planning and Governance. The Initiative in this area was begun by several well-established community agencies, and has expanded to include over 140 organizations, churches, and business interests. The resulting consortium acts as a group of the whole. There are no officers; instead, there is a person who acts as a convener. Two committees -- program and finance -- have been established. The consortium meets monthly and committees meet as needed. The consortium issues RFP's to community agencies defining its service priorities. The program committee reviews submitted proposals for new or expanded services and makes recommendations about support to the group as a whole.

Services. This consortium has created a comprehensive strategy for addressing the needs of youth. Two programs have been funded through the Initiative. The first, afterschool programming for residents of a local housing project, was developed collaboratively by service providers and other local institutions, including a church and a public school. The second program seeks to increase youth participation in organized sports through training of local residents and staff as coaches and referees who will coordinate regular tournaments in the community. The program also seeks to expose young people to diverse opportunities in Chicago through Urban Camps, enabling young people to visit cultural and educational institutions, explore ethnic neighborhoods, and learn about business opportunities. This program is the result of a collaboration among eighteen community organizations including service providers, small community groups, a city park, local churches, and health care providers.

tions, such as churches or schools, are members, to what extent do they participate as individuals and to what extent as officials able to speak for and commit the resources of their organizations?

- *When the project in the suburban community began, its conveners invited the participation of community leaders who were heads of public entities – police, schools, library, park district, and village and township governments – as well as officers of PTA's, homeowners groups, churches, voluntary associations, and a few social agencies. As the project created an ongoing council, the group decided that, although members participated as individuals, they were in a position to represent their institutions, and to make decisions on behalf of their organizations or to seek approval from their boards. This dual role has worked well for the community, in part because of an established practice in the village of cross-sector meetings in which people clarify when they are speaking personally and when in role.*

Representation is an equally significant issue for members who participate as community residents. What interests are residents expected to represent--those of the organizations they belong to or work for; those of the racial, ethnic, religious, or other groups with which they are affiliated; or the larger interests of the "community" as they see them? Groups are also struggling with the representation and roles of social service providers as compared to those of residents, clergy, members of civic associations, and other community leaders. How should a community council balance the knowledge of providers experienced in serving children and families with the knowledge of residents and community leaders concerning local needs and preferences, as well as their authority--whether arising from their position as citizens of the community or conferred by their roles in the Initiative?

Suburban Village

This "older" suburb has been home to many of the Chicago area's wealthier white families for generations. The community involved in the Initiative includes the incorporated Village and the surrounding unincorporated areas. In these areas, housing built in the '960s and 1970s for singles, young couples, and retirees now provides homes for newly resident families with several children. The recent influx of families includes many of modest education and income in which parents – one or both – work one or more jobs in the service industries in the area.

THE INITIATIVE

Planning and Governance. The community council began two-and-a-half years ago in response to a wave of youth vandalism. Initial invitations were sent to all organizations serving children and families. Included were executive-level representatives from public and private services, including the schools, the library, the police and fire departments, social agencies, churches, PTA's, service clubs, homeowner groups, and village and township government. When the group formalized, it limited membership on the council to executives of organizations, listing categories that should always be represented. Several seats were left for members-at-large, typically citizens who have worked for child and family interests.

The council operates by consensus. It acts as a forum through which agencies can collaborate to expand or create programs according to a community plan developed by the council. Co-chairs run the meetings, one from a public organization, one from the private sector. A few standing and ad hoc committees consider specific concerns, such as transportation, 11-to-15 year-old socially marginal youth, media effects on families, and a community resource guide.

A steering committee, which includes officers and those most willing to attend an additional meeting each month, works on details of matters that arise in the council, recommends agenda items, and develops strategies to expand membership, with an emphasis on diversity.

Services. This community, which has a fuller range of services currently in place than many of the other Initiative communities, is creating the position of coordinator of services for children and families. This individual will help link youth and families to primary and specialized services, refer residents to agencies able to address their diverse needs, advocate to ensure that such services are provided, and provide community education and networking among service providers to identify and meet community needs.

- *In one Initiative community, the community council is composed of residents and representatives of organizations other than social service providers, including a school principal, a librarian, and several people who own or work for local businesses. A question they confront is how they should reach out to and engage those experienced in providing services, including specialized services, in their deliberations.*

- *In another community, the community council was initially formed by the executive directors of ten community organizations, many of them old-line settlement houses. Many of these directors have lived and worked in the community for years, but find that their identity as residents and community leaders is being discounted in favor of their identities as providers. Moreover, as they move to include residents and representatives of organizations inexperienced in serving children, they are struggling to find ways to share decision making authority.*

In Initiative communities that are racially and ethnically diverse, the issue of representation becomes even more complex.

- *According to Census data, the population of one Initiative community includes individuals of Asian, Hispanic, African American, white, and Native American descent. But these categories mask diversity within each of these groups. The Asian population, for example, includes people of Cambodian, Vietnamese, Hmong, Chinese, Korean, Thai, and Laotian descent. Similarly, the Hispanic population includes residents of Puerto Rican, Mexican, and Cuban origin. The African Americans include West Indians from Haiti and Jamaica, and recent African immigrants from Nigeria and Ethiopia.*

The diversity of viewpoints and needs among subgroups can be as great as or greater than the differences between the major racial and ethnic groups defined by the Census. These differences can arise from factors such as gender, language, age, class, religion, and other social or political differences, including, for immigrants, differences in reasons for leaving their country of origin. These differences have powerful implications for planning and priority setting.

Ensuring broad representation is even more challenging in communities made up of social groups that are segregated and have little experience with or knowledge of each other. One community has created highly prescriptive guidelines regarding council membership to bridge this segregation and ensure broad representation.

- *There are community council positions, based on population, to represent each of five neighborhoods within one Initiative community, at-large positions for a youth and an adult representing special needs youth, and at-large positions for a youth and an adult representing each of the community's five ethnic and racial groups. Beyond this formal assurance of some diversity on the community council, the group is working to develop ways to interact with and obtain input from the larger community.*

SHOULD ALL GROUPS BE REPRESENTED?

Community councils are confronting the issue of whether all segments of a community should be represented, particularly controversial ones such as gangs or groups committed to strong political goals. The community council in one community confronted this question for the first time in a somewhat surprising way. Now, residents of a large public housing complex, large and small agencies, church-affiliated and secular agencies, and gang members as well as mothers opposed to gangs are all represented on the community council. But it was not always so.

- *The area has a history of adverse relationships among agencies, community groups, and residents. These groups had met together for a year and a half as the Initiative community council. Outside formal meetings, many members had raised the issue of whether gang members should be allowed to participate in the planning process. Many were surprised when a longstanding member of the community council asked those present if they had "any problem with 'us' being at the table." By "us" he meant gangs, and thereby revealed for the first time that he was not only a member but a key officer in a gang. All present were asked their reaction to having gang members at the table, and most indicated that it was not a problem.*

This was an important step for the group. The issue of gang participation was in the open and could be discussed. This interaction -- and recognizing gang members as part of the planning process -- opened channels of communication and possibilities for problem solving.

Gang involvement in Initiative community councils remains a matter of contention in some communities. In others there is opposition to including representatives of groups strongly committed to a single political goal -- for example, statehood for Puerto Rico -- for fear the Initiative will be used to champion particular causes. There has also been concern about including representatives of churches -- in some cases because of their fundamentalist beliefs, which may limit the range of issues councils can address and the options open to them. In some predominantly poor communities, councils have been apprehensive about including newly arrived "yuppies," who bring with them the threat of gentrification and the subsequent displacement of poorer residents.

Whatever the composition of a community council, it will need to reach out to the larger community to augment the diversity of views represented. The community council will need to create ways to get community input on the interests and needs of children and families, on priorities for the allocation of resources and on its own decisions and actions. Community outreach will also be needed to find youth and adult residents and local leaders to serve on the community council. Initiative communities have begun to develop ways of reaching the larger community. These include holding a youth day at a sports stadium, conducting a series of community forums to talk about issues of interest to parents, and publishing a newsletter describing community council actions, upcoming local Initiative events, and available services.

HOW CAN PARTICIPATION BE BROADENED AND SUSTAINED?

There is a powerful tension between, on the one hand, making collaborative planning, decision making, and action efficient and, on the other hand, maintaining or expanding participation in the community council. Staff members of large organizations can usually commit the time necessary to remain involved in Initiative planning, but the time commitment required can discourage the continued participation of residents and staff from smaller organizations. Residents drift away for many reasons, including the demands of pressing life concerns, a sense that they lack a role or voice comparable to those of service providers or other professionals, impatience with extended and often highly inefficient meetings, or dissatisfaction with results.

- *As one community council member, a local resident, has said: "The meetings tend to drag on and on, and then, most of the time, the meeting's over and we sort of feel -- did we even accomplish anything tonight? I'm not sure we're moving anywhere. It all takes so much discussion...It gets to a point where there's so much discussion, and somebody finally says let's do this and everybody sort of agrees."*

Members representing small grassroots organizations and churches can find prolonged meetings taxing because their programs are run through the efforts of very few people, often volunteers, and they tend to see planning as time torn from their primary mission -- serving people. Service providers whose proposals are not funded may drift away for a number of reasons: the time invested in the long but fruitless proposal writing and review process, the ambiguity of what comes next (more meetings, leading to more proposal revisions, leading to...), or the press of other business.

- *At a council meeting in one community, the council leader announced that decisions on proposals submitted for the funder's June meeting would be deferred until the next quarterly meeting in the fall because the proposals needed further development. As the meeting ended, a minister commented with a combination of anguish and fury: "Do you know what it took to write that proposal? If my kids and parents were here now they'd kill me. We had to turn away thirty kids. I had to take my youth worker and put him to proposal writing. Kids weren't served this spring in the hopes of serving more this summer and now that won't happen either."*

Youth members in particular can feel discounted and ineffective unless efforts are made to provide a place and process for their contributions.

- *One community has taken a number of steps to engage young people: inviting them to sit as full members at community council meetings, holding separate daytime meetings for youth members to define issues of concern to them, and featuring a youth panel presentation and discussions of youth community concerns at the group's annual community meeting -- in short, making a sustained investment in a role for youth.*

Similar accommodations of adult residents and the leaders of grassroots organizations -- providing staff attention, choosing convenient meeting times and places -- may be needed to secure access to their leadership and sustained participation.

Many of the community councils recognize that it is crucial to include residents, grassroots organizations, and youth because they bring information, connections, and credibility. In seeking ways to reach out to residents as well as grassroots organizations, many councils view community organizing as increasingly important. It is a resource often overlooked in community-focused initiatives. Experienced community organizers can identify local leaders among residents and in smaller grassroots organizations and engage them in the planning process. They can also help participants address longstanding conflicts or fundamental differences in viewpoints. Unfortunately, community organizing is a skill for which training and funding are now largely unavailable.

Leadership and board development training can aid in creating a community council that understands the dimensions of board responsibility and possesses fundamental skills, such as running an effective meeting. Board structure can also make an important difference. Staggered terms for board members can provide continuity. Committees created to tackle specific problems can include a broad range of new participants while allowing members to contribute in areas of particular interest and limit the amount of time any one member must give to the effort as a whole.

HOW ARE EFFECTIVE WORKING GROUPS BUILT?

Building an effective planning and governance group, or community council, depends on creating sound relationships among members. Reluctance to undermine relationships can sometimes slow progress.

- *In several communities, the community councils have been reluctant to seek funding for new programs from the Initiative sponsor. They are concerned that the process of endorsing some proposals but not others would derail the broad coalition building necessary to plan and oversee development of an infrastructure of services.*

Tensions from competition for funds within the community council and the community might be lessened somewhat by seeking funds from multiple sources, rather than from a single initiative sponsor, from the start. Moreover, communities will have to experience benefits other than funding if initiatives, and community-building efforts more broadly, are to be sustained over time. In Initiative communities, there are beginning to be benefits of this kind.

- *Students attending the high school in an Initiative community include youth from eight public housing developments. Given the turf war between gangs, having students from many developments can pose serious problems. Some students were afraid to walk to school for fear of being harassed or worse. Under the leadership of the Initiative community council, a group of over 25 community members, including representatives from the high school, the Chicago Housing Authority, and the police department, as well as parents and a person with close relations with the gangs, have begun meeting to develop "safe passage" routes for youth to get to school. In addition, they are designing a phone-tree to efficiently convey information. For example, if there is gang violence, the phone-tree will be used to mobilize adults to be out on assigned blocks along "safe passage" streets.*

Building coalitions is crucial to the development of the Initiative in all communities. While shared goals and a willingness to work together are a basis for community council functioning, the dynamics of conflict as well as cooperation are inevitable. Tensions occur on several levels: between the community councils and the community coalitions and providers not involved in the Initiative planning process, about representation and decisions made; between the council and its funders, around issues of direction setting, funding decisions, and assessment of progress; and among members of the community council, about issues such as rights to leadership, direction setting, and decisionmaking.

A dynamic that can trigger cohesiveness within a community council is rallying against a common "enemy."

- *One community council defined Initiative community boundaries to include an African American neighborhood, several European American neighborhoods, and neighborhoods in which European Americans, Hispanics, African Americans, and Arab Americans live together. Sites for community council meetings are rotated among these neighborhoods. Initially, community council members were reluctant to go to neighborhoods other than their own. However, when the foundation sponsor threatened to decline future funding for a teen center in the African American neighborhood, the community council rallied in support of the center and its director. This fostered relationships among community council members that outlasted the resolution of the funding crisis.*

A variation on this kind of alliance against an enemy can occur with an internal "enemy," when the majority of community council members unite to contend with a member who is seen as controlling, politically ambitious, or unwilling to follow through on commitments.

Creating and sustaining a cohesive group cannot, of course, be accomplished solely or even largely by common cause against an adversary. Making decisions and resolving conflicts, while avoiding win-lose outcomes, require a strong commitment to negotiation and compromise. Time is also an important ingredient in creating working coalitions--time to get to know the various participants in a community council, to understand their perspectives and concerns and to develop relationships that can survive disagreement in the process of forging cooperative efforts and common goals.

HOW DO COMMUNITY COUNCILS WORK?

To bring more stability and continuity to their operations, planning bodies in many communities have adopted traditional features of board operations such as officers, committees, and by-laws. One group has incorporated as a 501(c)(3), and others plan to take this action so that they can receive and manage their own funds, eliminating use of another organization as a fiscal agent. A number of community councils have developed mechanisms for proposal review and monitoring, as well as processes to assist smaller grassroots organizations in proposal development and accounting to foundations for funded projects.

While a better defined structure and clear operating procedures are necessary for effective group operations and are generally seen as a sign of progress, some groups feel such bureaucratization can threaten coalition building.

- *In one Initiative community committed to coalition building, the community council of over 140 members functions as a committee of the whole. They are concerned that designating leadership positions would create groups of insiders and outsiders, weakening the coalition-building process. The group is led by the director of a local organization who acts as "convener." Subcommittees of volunteers are created as needed.*

Progress in comprehensive community initiatives is not -- and should not be expected to be --linear. For example, several Initiative communities that had developed solid community councils have reshaped the membership or structure of their groups in order to become more broadly representative or to function more

effectively. Such changes can take substantial time, require a catch-up period for new members, and interrupt progress on other fronts.

- *In one community, an elected governing board replaced an interim board, requiring that the new group get to know each other, learn about the substance of the Initiative and its history to date, and develop processes for working together as a board.*

- *The community council in another community initially had two geographically defined clusters with two separate lead agencies and two staff directors, causing problems in communication and action. After months of difficult operations, members approached the politically delicate issue of altering the group's structure. After delay in addressing the issue, they reached resolution fairly quickly -- there is now one lead agency and one staff director, and a board chair and officers have been elected.*

Balancing community input on the one hand with effective structures and efficient processes for decisionmaking on the other is a tension that community councils continue to face.

HIRING STAFF

In virtually all communities staff functions have been created to support Initiative development. These positions have been filled by employees, consultants, or both. This action has streamlined the management and furthered the progress of the community councils, but it has raised a number of important questions. For example, what is an appropriate staff role in a process designed to empower the community? In particular, how does someone in a staff position avoid becoming the gatekeeper for information or the center of power? Because staff directors work full time on the Initiative and community council officers and members do not, funders, technical assistance providers, and evaluators may be inclined to deal with the primary staff person, who becomes a de facto executive director. This inclination is worth tempering in favor of keeping the center of gravity -- of learning and decision making -- with the community council or at least with its executive committee. A further concern in giving primary direction-setting responsibilities to staff members is that, if they leave, much of the community council's momentum and know-how go with them.

COLLABORATIVE DECISIONMAKING

The new and complex ways in which community councils are trying to work raise challenging issues: What is meant by collaborative decisionmaking? How do tough issues get raised, decisions reached, or conflicts resolved in the context of a collaborative planning and decisionmaking process?

Standard meeting-management practices can be used to facilitate sound discussions and decisionmaking. But Initiative community councils often do not use such mechanisms as rotating the role of the chair and voting. In some communities, particularly those with newly created community councils, members have sought training in leadership and board development. Some communities, however, may require more than training. Members may need to sufficiently get to know one another's concerns and positions to feel comfortable taking the public stands that voting requires. Early, inconclusive discussions may be an important part of coalition-building in some groups; taking care not to seek funds for some and not other providers, or to elect officers prematurely, may be others.

- *For over a year, one community council, consisting of sophisticated social service professionals, avoided establishing any formal structure for either leading discussions or decisionmaking. This arrangement seemed to be an unspoken but conscious decision by the group to acknowledge members' status as peers and to reinforce their nascent alliance. In time, trust grew, as did frustration about the length and lack of clarity in meetings. These two developments led to election of officers, creation of committees, preparation of meeting agendas and minutes, and formal voting. The year it took to get this level of organization was perceived by members as important in the coalition-building process.*

EXERCISING AUTHORITY AND BEING ACCOUNTABLE

Making decisions and being accountable for those decisions are two of the major challenges in collaborative efforts. This has been true in the Initiative, in both the planning and program areas. Having to make complicated or controversial decisions can put newly formed coalitions in positions they are not yet prepared to deal with.

- *In one community, organizations that were not involved in the Initiative planning process approached the funder with independent proposals. They were told that their proposals had to come through the planning body and be approved as consistent with the community plan, prior to being reviewed by the funder. Though the planning body had developed a process for incorporating uninvolved parties in their efforts, they were politically unprepared to "welcome" new participants by making a decision on their already-prepared program proposals. Initially, the community council balked at the funder's suggestion that they assume this responsibility.*

- *Some community councils have resisted the proposal review function. The umbrella organization that is spearheading planning in one community has passed the proposal review function on to the funder, being unwilling, at least initially, to formally pass judgment on the adequacy of members' proposals.*

Accountability, though closely related to authority, has its own set of issues and questions. Chief among them: to whom is the community council accountable -- its members, the consumers of services planned through its efforts, its funders, or the larger community? In fact, the community council is likely to be accountable to each of these stakeholders, and has to determine how to account for its decisions and actions to each. (The relationship and accountability of the community council to the funder is discussed separately in a section that follows.)

Here are two examples of how issues of authority and accountability have surfaced in the Initiative.

- *An Initiative community has planned, and with Initiative funds has created, three teen centers in three distinct neighborhoods. Center directors meet jointly for planning and training, and participants come together for shared activities. The issue of relative authority was raised when the board of one teen center authorized a substantial salary increase for its center director and the Initiative community council objected, wanting the authority to create comparability among center director salaries. As a result, the community council has established policy guidelines concerning the relationship between the council and services funded through council endorsement or assistance.*

The need for greater accountability has pushed some community councils to create structures and processes to meet these responsibilities.

- *In one community, members have developed mechanisms for proposal review and monitoring of funded programs. In monthly collaborators meetings, each agency reports quantifiable progress on program objectives and participates actively in a forum on problems in the service collaborations. Quarterly, the chair of this group reports to the governing board. Members of the governing board (over 60 in number) then take the opportunity to question program directors about service responsiveness and related issues.*

Community councils are beginning to develop written standards for prospective programs. These standards clarify the responsibility of programs funded through council efforts to report to the council on such matters as program services, staffing, and financial status, and to engage in cross-project staff meetings and joint youth activities. Beyond this, some councils are beginning to grapple with such fundamental and complex questions as whether they should support programs that reflect the views of a particular religion, and whether there are ways to ensure that young people of diverse backgrounds are welcome at programs endorsed by the council.

CREATING A SHARED VISION AND FRAMEWORK FOR INFRASTRUCTURE DEVELOPMENT

The challenges involved in developing a community-directed service infrastructure are intensified by the fact that the Initiative is in a state of evolution. Each community, as well as each participant in each community, learns about the Initiative as they join the process, and is therefore subject to a somewhat different view of the Initiative's aims. This has made knowledge of the Initiative's reform agenda uneven and left much to individual and group interpretation. The lack of opportunity for developing a shared understanding has left many feeling that the vision is not "theirs," but rather belongs to the sponsor.

Many Initiative participants struggle with the meaning of the vision. What does collaboration really mean? What is included in enhancing access to services? What are the boundaries of the Initiative -- does it include educational reform, reform of the juvenile courts, or economic or physical redevelopment? For some, the problem of clarity has been exacerbated by concerns about fundamental principles of the Initiative. For example, primary services seem unimportant to some in the face of critical problems faced by children and families, such as poverty, violence, drug abuse, hunger, and homelessness. Community councils have not had sufficient opportunity to develop a coherent understanding of the Initiative service reform agenda, its parts and how they relate to each other, and how the Initiative's vision for social services relates to economic and physical development, or other pressing community needs.

Even if the full vision is incompletely "owned," some community councils have made progress toward a more comprehensive view of the Initiative by developing strategic plans. These groups are now developing both program proposals and proposal review mechanisms that fit with their strategic plans. In some communities, the Initiative has helped move the development of children and the functioning of families to a more prominent place on the communities' agendas, alongside such issues as economic development, neighborhood revitalization, or housing. This upward shift in prominence for the Initiative's central concerns has the potential to link the Initiative with the broader range of reform strategies necessary to build supportive communities.

In virtually all communities, the cycle of planning, funding, and implementing new services has increasingly focused the attention of community council members on day-to-day operations, leaving them little time and energy to focus on the long-term agenda. This may be part of an inevitable cycle. Recognizing this, and making the time to revisit the larger agenda at intervals, is a crucial part of managing this cycle and the implementation of the Initiative overall.

DEVELOPING AND LINKING SERVICES

ENHANCING AND LINKING PRIMARY SERVICES THROUGH COLLABORATION

The Children, Youth, and Families Initiative calls for enhancing primary services by several means--creating new services, improving existing services, linking new and existing services, and improving training for primary services workers. Collaborating toward these ends is remarkably complex for a variety of historical and administrative reasons. Many of the challenges faced in developing and linking services mirror those encountered in the governance process, discussed in the previous section of this paper.

THE COMPLEXITIES OF COLLABORATION

Scarce resources have caused intense competition between social service agencies vying for the same dollars. Organizations work hard to distinguish themselves from one another, carve out their "turf," and convince funders (as well as themselves) that the services they provide are unique and better than those provided by others. What will it take for organizations to relinquish this orientation and work cooperatively toward some perceived common good? Even if organizations can be convinced that working together is in their best interest, they face a new set of challenges in attempting to link services. While "linking" primary services could mean something as minimal as opportunities for staff from different organizations to meet one another and learn about each other's programs, the Initiative, like many other current reform initiatives, has defined "linking" as "collabo-

ration," suggesting a more intense and formal relationship. Most definitions of collaboration suggest that individual agendas have to be altered in favor of a shared objective. Programs funded through the Initiative are attempting to achieve this ideal, and their experiences are illuminating.

Differences among organizations -- in program philosophies, goals, and practices, in size and sophistication -- can enrich and increase the scope of collaborations, but they can also make effective collaboration difficult.

- *In one of the Initiative communities, the partner organizations developed a bus route enabling youth to cross gang boundaries to participate in programs. Then, they were faced with the problem of what happens when youth allowed to wear gang caps and colors at their home organization show up for participation at an agency where these insignia are strictly forbidden -- a difference that reflects strongly held views about how to engage and serve young people. Differences in philosophy, approach, and practice have to be ironed out while the bus is running.*

Other philosophical and practice issues have been brought to light by collaborative efforts involving religious and secular organizations. Secular organizations can be reluctant to send their participants to church-based primary service programs, which may have religious content or overtones, and churches can be reluctant to have staff from secular organizations work at their sites for fear that their attitudes will not be consistent with church beliefs and practices.

Disparity in size and experience among collaborating organizations introduces a host of problems. How do organizations of radically different size and experience come together without domination on the part of the larger, more established agencies? The experience of organizations involved in the Initiative suggests that this can be a difficult marriage. There is a tendency for large established agencies to overwhelm smaller organizations.

- *In one community, a group of small ethnic associations were paired in setting up a youth center with a YMCA, whose motivations as a "power player" they mistrusted. This fear was confirmed when the Y was made the fiscal agent and allocated money for staff positions. The ethnic associations had to volunteer their already overburdened staff to do outreach to involve their youth in the program.*

  To move forward, the associations and the Y had to overcome this mistrust. By meeting regularly for over a year, they learned to recognize and respect the cultural orientations, managerial styles, perspectives, and priorities that each group brought to the effort. In addition, the Y learned to view the collaboration from the perspective of the ethnic organizations. What the Y initially saw as gains for the ethnic associations -- use of the Y's facilities and staff training -- the associations saw as possible threats to their authority and as a further drain on their staff hours. The Y Program Director has made special efforts to visit the ethnic associations on a regular and informal basis, allowing relationships to develop. The sponsor, too, learned from its involvement in this project, and has provided funds to the ethnic associations for additional staff.

  The ethnic associations faced a problem common for small, understaffed organizations creating new programs: balancing staff involvement in the collaborative project for youth with their other services. The Initiative's exclusive funding for children and families fragmented the associations' programming and fundraising efforts. In addition, the associations worry that an outside perception of abundant funding through the Initiative may hurt their chances of attracting funding for other programs.

When the larger organization is the collaborative's fiscal agent, the relationship is muddied, even more so when the smaller organization has day-to-day supervisory responsibility for staff.

- *A small teen center operated with its own center director but with a larger organization as fiscal agent for Initiative funding. The center director was dissatisfied with the work of a staff member and, considering himself fully authorized to make hiring and firing decisions, fired him. The fired staffer, believing that his rights had been violated, sued the larger organization -- the source of his paycheck and the organization with the "deeper pockets."*

The issues of hiring, supervision, and firing are highly complex in collaborative efforts, regardless of the relative size of collaborating partners.

- *In one community, a program director was hired to lead a collaboration among four organizations. Three of these organizations had a shared view about her job responsibilities. When the program director disagreed, she went to the executive director of the fourth organization -- who wrote her paycheck and who agreed with her -- undermining a collaborative decisionmaking process.*

The role of staff in holding partners accountable for their commitments to the collaboration is similarly complex.

- *In one community a group of collaborating organizations hired a program coordinator who reports to the group. One of the partners had committed to finding volunteers for an afterschool tutoring program, but was not following through. The program coordinator felt constrained in trying to hold this organization accountable because the organization's representative to the collaborative is, in effect, also the coordinator's employer.*

Frequently these collaborations are fragile alliances that initially rely on the good will of their members. When members fail to meet their obligations, or when they disagree about how a situation should be handled, there is a tendency for group members to avoid directly addressing the situation. Experience has shown, however, that over time, as people come to know each other, groups can find solutions to problems without threatening the alliances they have been working to establish -- for example, by developing written agreements to define members' program and reporting responsibilities, and then using collaborators' meetings or other mechanisms to monitor performance against these agreements.

INVOLVING GRASSROOTS ORGANIZATIONS

Bringing grassroots organizations into an infrastructure of services is essential, but especially challenging. Many grassroots programs have been built on the vision of a single leader, the energy of a small group of residents working to address a common need, or the expansion of an organization's scope beyond its original purpose. These programs offer a range of resources and services: tutoring programs, youth marching bands and softball or basketball leagues, day care arranged by mothers and provided by local women, cooperative ways to do laundry or buy food, emergency loans, neighborhood security services, GED classes, and more.

These resources are often the first stop for young people and families in seeking help. In creating a service infrastructure, community councils have to know what grassroots offerings exist, understand if there are ways to facilitate their functioning, and plan ways to include them in planning, funding, and service delivery. Community councils must ask, for example, whether it is reasonable, or even desirable, to expect these programs to create boards of directors, or develop the management capacity to track program participants or report regularly to funders, and if so, what time and investment of resources should be directed to these ends.

Neighborhood organizations attempting to create new programs with little program development expertise have experienced problems of several kinds.

- *One organization that had little experience with recruitment tried to fill thirty-five slots in an afterschool program by distributing fifty flyers in the neighborhood -- and were surprised and disappointed when only a few parents responded.*

- *An organization with limited budget experience failed to include taxes and benefits in staff salaries when preparing their budget. They hired staff and made salary promises, then found they could afford to pay only about 75 percent of what was promised.*

Many small grassroots organizations are unprepared for the expectations of large foundations concerning funding and project monitoring. Almost all of these organizations operate on shoestring budgets, if there is any budget at all, and depend on the investment of their own efforts and the generosity of local contributors.

- *One organization, relying heavily on volunteers, had worked with gang- and drug-involved youth for many years. Its overall budget never exceeded $25,000 and came almost entirely from one contributor who believed in what the organization was doing. The organization's proposal asked for funding of close to $125,000 to radically expand its services. After an arduous negotiating process, including a rewrite of their proposal, the organization received funding of $50,000 with a requirement for quarterly reporting to the foundation. The group found the experience demoralizing. Group members were insulted by an apparent lack of faith in their integrity and infuriated because they felt deceived and disrespected. They thought seriously of not accepting the money at all in protest of their treatment.*

- *The organization eventually accepted the money and cut back on its planned program. The reduced program was extremely successful, providing Afrocentric leadership training, participation opportunities for many young people, and an unplanned spin-off: an eighteen-week education program for its graduates at the local community college. The organization has struggled to provide a quality program and be accountable to the funder, and has in fact surpassed most goals. With its strained relationship mended, the organization has applied for a second year grant, this time for $50,000, which the foundation has approved with a requirement for annual, not quarterly, reports.*

In many such circumstances, community councils find that they have to play an intermediary role, both preparing organizations for the expectations of foundations and helping foundations to understand the vital role and capacities of these smaller, less sophisticated organizations. Creating an infrastructure of services means supporting grassroots programs -- in some cases finding ways to work that don't require them to behave like established mainstream organizations, and in others helping them to develop expertise in proposal preparation, program development, administration, and reporting.

One of the potential benefits of collaboration among small grassroots organizations and more established agencies is that, when they work, they provide avenues for foundations to invest substantially more funds in working with grassroots organizations than might otherwise be possible, without asking less formal groups to take on the trappings of mainstream organizations, trappings that may undermine the purposes and effectiveness of these groups.

LINKING PRIMARY AND SPECIALIZED SERVICES

Collaborations between primary and specialized providers are an essential component of the Initiative, but there have been limited collaborations of this kind to date. Moreover, there are very few models of primary-specialized collaborations to draw on. Effective collaborations between primary and specialized providers require developing a shared language and accommodating differences in training and approaches to providing services. Effectively linking primary and specialized services may require mental health services, for example, to be provided in a very different manner than the traditional office visit.

- *In one Initiative program, mental health specialists, in addition to providing individual and family counseling and staff training, teach poetry classes and play basketball with youth in the network of open gyms the collaborative has created. These activities enable the mental health specialists to get to know young people and be available to them in ordinary settings and, because of their more complete understanding of young people's lives and environments, to increase their effectiveness in working with both children and families and in consulting with primary services staff. But these positions tend to be difficult to fill because they are not consistent with the job expectations of many mental health professionals.*

- *In another collaboration, a mental health provider is helping to staff a tutoring program in a local library and is linking with teen centers by running youth groups at the centers and providing referral and case management assistance to teen center participants.*

- *In a third Initiative program, staff of a rehabilitation center and mental health professionals are working with a sports league to offer on-site training for coaches. Training addresses the developmental stages of adolescence, recognizes the effects of sustained stress on youth and addresses ways to support them, and offers ways to include special needs youth in league teams.*

Supervision of specialized service staff in a primary service setting can be problematic. With limited specialized expertise available in many primary service programs, some organizations may look for supervision from outside the collaboration. However, it is important that a clinical supervisor understand and support the purposes of the specialized/primary collaborations.

RISKS AND BENEFITS OF COLLABORATION

Comprehensive community initiatives often mandate collaboration in service provision, and there is a strong inclination among service providers to promise community councils and funders what they say they want. These factors led to frustration in the collaboration of the ethnic associations and the YMCA described above.

- *In their original proposal, the ethnic associations each wanted to hire a youth worker to outreach to each group's isolated youth. Instead the sponsor encouraged them to develop a joint teen center to help youth of diverse backgrounds understand one another, and the ethnic associations acquiesced. When the center opened, it was used first by African American youth. Center staff found that young people – particularly those new to this country – were not willing to cross cultural boundaries until they had developed some security in their own cultural group. Ultimately, the Trust, the ethnic associations, and the Y acknowledged the need to strengthen the programming of the individual ethnic associations while working to bring their youth together through the teen center's programs.*

Given the complexities of collaboration, what are the benefits, what keeps participants and organizations involved? Some benefits are obvious, others are not. Collaborating organizations can communicate with each other more openly and over time more honestly, reducing the isolation many agency directors and staff feel when competition for recognition and funding is stiff.

- *"It requires shedding your ego and having the ability to understand and empathize with your partner, like being married to seven people," stated a staff member of one community council. In another community, an agency director and member of a community council stated that a sense develops that "...we are all in this together and must depend upon each other for our success. The results are stronger because you have a lot of time and effort invested in the project and you have worked with people and care about them more because of the process. You sense the whole community, what it means to be a community in a process like that. You're not just serving them, you are all helping each other."*

The shared communication and commitment of collaboration can create collective ownership, energy, and support for solving problems or generating new ideas for services. Collaboration also has the potential for cutting down on duplication, facilitating cost-effective joint training, and better utilizing an agency's expertise. And the appeal of collaboration for funders makes it more likely that organizations will secure the resources to pursue joint goals.

ACCESS TO SERVICES

INFORMATION AND HELPING

Making a social services infrastructure function effectively requires that children and families know of and have access to services. The largest group of Initiative efforts to increase access to existing services involves information -- trying to ensure that residents and providers know about new and existing services.

- *One community council in a predominantly Hispanic area produced a colorful and fairly comprehensive community resource guide in both Spanish and English. While this guide was extremely impressive to social service providers and other literate adults, the group learned that young people did not use it. The group is now distributing much less formal flyers to tell youth about activities.*

- *Another community has established an automated system with information about available services that is accessible through the public libraries as well as through personal computers equipped with modems. This community planned to develop a bilingual kiosk-based computer system for accessing service information, but this plan was abandoned when development of the prototype proved too costly.*

Though not successful with youth, directories have been very useful to providers. They have offered, among other benefits, enhanced linking of grassroots organizations with one another and with larger, more formal organizations.

In response to the need to take information to people, some communities have made community education and outreach a part of their Initiative programming.

- *The staff in a local collaborative makes regular visits to public schools to discuss available services and recruit interested youth. Using the names and addresses of interested young people, they follow up with parents about registering their children in the program. If parents don't come in to register children, staff may go to their homes to explain the program and seek parental permission for children to participate. Frequently, staff are able to allay parents' fears and involve young people who would otherwise be missed by organized primary services.*

- *One Initiative community organized a day-long youth conference at a baseball stadium. The conference created an opportunity for young people to talk with adults about their needs and to learn about programs and activities in the community at information booths staffed by primary and specialized providers. Another community offers occasional forums to address issues of interest to parents and provide information about available services.*

Other communities have used increasing contact and information exchange among agencies as a way to improve access to services, in part by supporting an increase in the frequency and appropriateness of referrals.

- *One collaborative program has placed a strong emphasis on interagency communications. Their efforts include joint monthly staff meetings, a monthly interagency newsletter informing staff about what is happening in participating organizations, and regular "staff exchange days," in which staff from one agency spend the day working in another agency to learn "hands on" about that organization and its services. Over time staff will rotate through all collaborating agencies.*

- *The council in one community has put together a "Blue Book," a directory of area providers that community council members describe as a valuable resource for area service providers. Having met people at community council meetings and having at hand a name and phone number has helped staff find assistance for youth, and has led to voluntary efforts among some providers, without funds from the Initiative, to share resources such as space, equipment, and activities.*

The framework on which the Initiative is based includes the concept of special "helping functions," designed to make the full range of services accessible to individual children and parents. The framework envisions a graduated series of functions, ranging from information provision through case management, to match various levels of need for assistance among children and parents. The helping functions should include both information about existing services and assistance in creating strategies for effective service use. Both of these are essential to making sure that a service infrastructure can be used as a coherent service system by individual children and parents.

Communities have begun to develop a variety of mechanisms for making information about services more widely available, including directories and events. One community has gone beyond this to staff the information function.

- *One community has created a Coordinator of Services to Families and Children. This person serves three functions: providing information to youth and parents about community resources; providing guidance in how to handle problems and help in accessing the services of the schools, service agencies, the park district, and other organizations; and providing assistance to service personnel, for example, youth officers, public aid workers, or school social workers, in coordinating the services of other agencies.*

BARRIERS TO ACCESS

Other efforts to increase access to services have confronted the wide variety of barriers that may limit residents using services even when they are aware of them. Many parents, particularly in inner-city communities, are unwilling to allow their children to participate in community activities because of threats to their children's safety.

- *A community council for a community that includes a large public housing development has struggled with how to address safety. A part of their solution has been to include local gang members at the planning table, giving them a voice in what and how services are provided and soliciting their support in ensuring program safety. They are also exploring the idea of a safety patrol that would escort children to and from Initiative programs.*

- *Another community struggling with issues of safety has attempted two different but complementary approaches. First, community council members worked to expand the number of program sites -- for example, bringing services into underutilized facilities like local churches -- in an attempt to minimize the distance anyone has to travel to access basic services. Second, they created a bus system that covers the collaborating organizations as well as the library and public parks. When the bus was introduced few young people used it. Several explanations were offered for this -- reluctance to use anything other than their "home" organization's programs, problems with coordinating the timing of programs and the bus schedule, or the stigma for adolescents of riding on a big yellow school bus. The collaborative tried a number of things to make the transportation plan more flexible and acceptable to young people, including the use of two mini-buses rather than a single large bus. In addition, staff began taking youth to visit partner organizations, introducing them to the programs and people, after which both bus ridership and use of programs across sites increased.*

The location of programs and logistics of transportation can also be issues in suburban communities, with children unable to reach programs because of the distances involved and limited public transportation. The suburban Initiative community is also experimenting with a youth bus.

Program fees are another potential barrier to access that have been the subject of considerable community council discussion. Should program fees be reduced or eliminated? Or do fees reinforce the value of services? Virtually all programs with fees offer sliding scales and the possibility of scholarships, but attitudes toward these options vary in community councils. Some community council members believe that it is demeaning to require parents to plead poverty to gain access for their children to the programs and services they need or want; other members question why parents who can afford to pay should not do so, since their payments allow providers to subsidize families who cannot pay.

PROVIDING SERVICES IN DIVERSE COMMUNITIES

Racial, ethnic and class differences can, even unintentionally, pose another barrier to access. Programs in two Initiative communities have made concerted efforts to attract youth of diverse racial and ethnic backgrounds, in both cases to a central teen center. Both programs have found it extremely difficult to create an environment that youth from different racial, ethnic and class backgrounds find equally inviting.

- *In one program in an ethnically mixed community, an outreach worker attempting to attract a diverse set of young people to the teen center's programs has encountered barriers resulting from the area's long history of racial and ethnic segregation. A result of this history is that organizations in specific neighborhoods have become identified with the racial or ethnic groups seen as "belonging" in that area. To get past this barrier, and ensure the safety and comfort of African American youth coming to the teen center in a predominantly European American community, youth workers have had to provide round-trip transportation between the center and the homes of these young people.*

Cultural and religious differences also play a major role in whether particular groups will choose to use available primary or specialized services.

- *A collaborative teen center established in another ethnically mixed Initiative community chose to hold its program at two sites, a Lutheran and a Catholic church. The program staff discovered that the use of one or the other site affects the composition of the group attending. Catholic youth prefer to participate in the programs at their church and tend not to come to the Lutheran Church. Moreover, Palestinian youth in the neighborhood, many of whom are from Muslim families, will not attend any program that is held in a church. The program is now also using more neutral sites such as the local park fieldhouse.*

- *In one community, a large, well-equipped local church offered an afterschool program. When recruitment took place through the neighborhood school, many children expressed an interest in participating. However, after permission slips were sent home, very few children applied. Staff learned that parents were reluctant to have their children participate in programming located in a church, even when they had been assured that the program would not be religious in nature. To address this concern, the program was offered instead as an extended-day program within the school.*

Cultural groups can vary greatly in attitudes about how their children should be socialized, in what contexts, and by whom. Cultural norms that prescribe the separation of boys and girls after puberty in certain Arab and South Asian cultures may lead parents from these communities to be wary of or reject programs that provide opportunities for teens to mix. Families recently arrived in the United States often have very high expectations for their children's academic success; they may not give high priority to primary services that emphasize the value of leisure activities, viewing these as potentially distracting.

Planning the content of programs can be complex in diverse communities. Youth from different backgrounds often have different interests and needs.

- *A program director for a teen center established to bridge the divide between recently arrived Southeast Asian immigrants and low-income African Americans has struggled to design activities suitable for both groups. A question he raises is whether the goal of bridging racial divisions should have priority over the goal of assisting these separate groups with their distinctive needs -- the need of new immigrants to learn English, and the need for role models for African American youth resisting gang life. The program is struggling to address these immediate but very different needs under the roof of one low-budget and understaffed teen center, and grappling with the question of what should take priority in providing services for these teenagers.*

These challenges underscore the importance of governing groups that are representative of their communities and knowledgeable about the local history of divisions between people and the varied beliefs and practices of racial, ethnic, and religious groups in the area.

CHILDREN WITH SPECIAL NEEDS

The Initiative's commitment to linking primary and specialized services is based in large part on two beliefs: that primary services should be a resource for as broad a group of children and youth as possible, and that the special needs of

some young people should not be addressed solely by separate programming in specialized settings. Specialized providers can play a vital role in helping primary service staff learn to serve young people with emotional and physical challenges.

- *The youth sports league in one community is recruiting young people with emotional and physical challenges. The league's coaches have received training and support from the Chicago Department of Mental Health and the Rehabilitation Institute of Chicago to incorporate these young people in the league's sports, recreation, and socialization activities.*

TRAINING FOR STAFF AND VOLUNTEERS

Training of all involved in efforts like the Initiative -- community council members, program staff, and volunteers -- is key to reforms that require new ways of thinking and acting on the part of all stakeholders. Staff training has been a component of program proposals in a number of communities.

- *One program combines a camping experience for inner-city youth with an intensive "hands-on" training component for community youth workers. Through a combination of classroom and experiential training, the program is committed to improving local youth workers' capacities to work with young people who present a variety of challenges and abilities.*

- *Another program has developed a support network for small, community-based afterschool programs, offering joint training to program volunteers and staff. This program is completing a survey and conducting visits to identify and meet the training needs of programs operating with too few staff to release any for training off-site.*

Collaborative programs have begun to find that in addition to increasing staff skills, training allows staff from partner organizations to develop a shared agenda for their work together, and that training for line staff can help collaborative services take hold beyond the initial commitments of agency executives. At the same time, collaborating organizations have been frustrated in trying to find training resources sufficiently knowledgeable about Initiative principles to provide relevant training.

Enhancing primary services so that they can play a larger, more central role in an infrastructure of services means increasing staff knowledge of child and youth development, improving their ability to recognize child and family problems and to respond with natural helping approaches, and enlarging primary and specialized providers' understanding of each other's purposes and practices so that they can better work together.

An approach to training that meets these goals and objectives will have to tackle a number of potentially problematic realities. Focusing on the primary services area, where training has received less attention, there is the fact that primary services are quite diverse, and their staffing patterns are equally diverse. Moreover, many are small operations staffed by one or a few persons who, whether paid or volunteer, have had little or no formal training. And few organizations have the resources to mount their own training programs.

These facts, coupled with the Initiative's service reform agenda, argue for a community-based, cooperative approach to training. Even in the absence of organizational constraints, however, there would be value in a cooperative approach--to build consensus about the knowledge and skills that should shape child and youth development work, and to establish common training programs to convey this consensus. Basing this training in communities, and bringing together the staffs of primary and specialized providers, can foster a sense of common cause among the staff, and pave the way for enriched programming in individual organizations and for collaboration among them.

PART 3: ACROSS COMMUNITIES: THE ROLES OF THE SPONSOR, THE EVALUATOR AND LEARNING

Part 2 offered evidence of the need for community residents, service providers, and other community stakeholders to examine traditional roles and behavior in light of the goals of creating a community-directed infrastructure of services for children and families. The need to examine--and challenge--roles and behavior is as important as the need for periodic review of the substance of Initiative visions, accomplishments, and challenges. Reflecting on and redefining roles is also important for stakeholders whose involvement crosses communities. In the three sections that follow, we examine the sponsor's role, the evaluator's role, and finally the role of all stakeholders in learning from each other.

THE SPONSOR'S ROLE

Foundations and governments are increasingly sponsoring initiatives to address problems faced by children, families, and communities. As noted at the outset, these initiatives recognize the limits of top-down approaches and therefore emphasize local capacity-building, leadership development, and agendas that are community-driven.

There is, however, an obvious and inherent tension in the notion of community-directed change toward a vision of reform when the vision is defined and brought to a community by an outside sponsor. On one hand there is the position that ideas and pressure must be brought to bear from outside the community; on the other there is the view that sustainable change must come from an agenda defined and owned by the community. The answer may be either, or a combination, of these approaches.

Most initiatives are struggling to achieve the benefits of a combined approach, joining the intellectual development effort and human and financial resources brought to the table by external sponsors with the community's leadership, organizational base, and experience. Sponsors can offer frameworks for reform, knowledge about the world of funders as well as funds of their own, and access to technical assistance. However, even when foundations are willing and able to devote these resources, including substantial investment of their own funds over a sustained period, the foundation and its funds are likely to serve principally as a catalyst for long-term change. A combined approach suggests that sustainable change requires the insights and energy of community leaders and residents and their commitment to reform goals.

The previous section's examples of one initiative in operation illustrate the tensions in a project involving an external sponsor and community participants. Here, we describe underlying issues -- organizational mission and practices, issues of control and accountability -- that give rise to some of the pressures encountered in practice.

WITHIN FOUNDATIONS

The challenge of balancing the interests of sponsor and community, in taking a vision as conceived into the realities of implementation, can manifest itself powerfully inside a sponsoring foundation. Foundation program officers can be torn between their foundation's standard practices and an initiative's commitment to community-generated decisions and action. They may find themselves having to advocate funding for grassroots organizations with less program development experience and significantly less management infrastructure than traditional grantees. They may also have to make the case with colleagues and foundation leadership for funding commitments over the extended timeline needed to effect reform. These claims, especially when made during a time of lean foundation budgets, can engender tensions among foundation colleagues, especially if they perceive preferential treatment of initiative funds.

BETWEEN FOUNDATION AND COMMUNITY

When foundations and communities enter into partnerships aimed at changing circumstances in

communities, some of the challenges they face are embedded in the past experiences and current aspirations of the sponsor and the community participants. For example, the two may differ in interpreting concepts at the heart of an initiative -- like the meaning of "community-based" or "community-directed" -- and these differences may surface only after sponsors and participants have invested substantial energy and time acting on their differing premises.

Most initiatives are guided by general principles rather than detailed blueprints for action. This means that the initiative sponsor and participants are faced with refining these general principles and, in the process, clarifying both initiative aims and appropriate strategies for reaching them. Questions of relative authority can surface at many points in the process. Whose interpretation of long-term goals holds sway? What role does each party have in decisions about the use of the funds sponsors are investing? Who determines when and how to use technical assistance and from what sources? Who participates in selecting evaluators and to whom do they report? Who decides what constitutes success, and how long it should take to get there? Issues of race/ethnicity, class, and gender, which may be embedded in sponsor-community relations, can powerfully influence interactions on these and other matters.

Such questions are inevitable, and so are differing perspectives in response to them. Especially in the face of uncertainty or disagreement, funders and participants interested in securing access to foundation funds are likely to fall back on dominant-subordinate grantor-grantee roles, undermining the initiative's intended notion of community-directed change. Success in forging forthright and equitable working relationships often depends on the expectations and conduct modeled by the funders, on the capacity to negotiate on both sides, and on the leadership styles of foundation and community participants.

RELATIONS AMONG FOUNDATIONS

The growing presence of comprehensive community initiatives has made it increasingly common to find a single community that is home to more than one initiative. Cooperation among sponsors has the potential both to avoid pitfalls and to enhance the power of the investments and the intervention strategies.

When sponsors fail to cooperate, community-rebuilding strategies may be fragmented and leaders overloaded by the need to create separate community councils, to meet the demands of separate reporting processes, and to deal with separate evaluations for multiple initiative sponsors, each with its own "logo" effort.

Alternatively, if sponsors find ways of working together, they may increase the likelihood that broad-based approaches to poverty alleviation and community building can be developed, and that resources will be used more effectively toward these ends.

GOVERNMENT INVOLVEMENT IN INITIATIVES

This discussion has been framed largely in terms of foundation sponsorship both because the lens for this analysis is a foundation-sponsored initiative and because foundation sponsorship has been dominant to date. However, governments at all levels are increasingly sponsoring community initiatives -- for example, through empowerment zones and federal legislation like Youth Fair Chance, and through community-based approaches to family preservation and support. Governments are also increasingly involved as participants in foundation-sponsored initiatives, a trend that is likely to continue as the long-term success of these initiatives, and of community-building more broadly, will depend on access to both the policymaking process and to public funds.

Government sponsors, and even government participants, are likely to confront many of the same challenges as foundation sponsors -- for example, in attempting to stimulate community-driven change from a position outside the community, in dealing with the potential for conflict in vision between community and sponsor, and in allowing the time necessary for community-directed change in the face of pressure for results. In fact, because government brings added power to the equation, it can also exacerbate the tensions between top-down and bottom-up approaches to change. Government sponsors and participants may face additional challenges as

well, such as the increased public scrutiny that comes with expenditure of public funds. Governments also have additional *opportunities* to enhance community change, of course, including control of macroeconomic policies, such as those related to job creation, that can be critical to successful community building.

Given the growing likelihood that foundation and government sponsors will be working in the same communities, cooperation between sponsors across the public and private sectors is increasingly important.

THE ROLE OF EVALUATION AND EVALUATORS

The current wave of comprehensive community-building initiatives also prompts questions about the traditional roles of evaluation and evaluators because of the broad and complex purposes of these initiatives, and the fact that their goals and the associated interventions are evolving in practice.

Chapin Hall is currently involved in proposing, advising, or evaluating a number of comprehensive community initiatives, and Chapin Hall staff working on these initiatives have come to see a need to adjust the traditional methods and roles of evaluators to better fit the complex and evolving purposes of community-building initiatives. Center staff are participating in the Roundtable on Comprehensive Community Initiatives for Children and Families and its steering committee on evaluation, which is working to develop evaluation methods that fit the purposes and processes of these initiatives.

There are a number of complex issues in the evaluation of community-building initiatives. What is the optimal evaluation method? How are the desired outcomes and indicators of progress to be defined? What is the appropriate posture for evaluators, balancing objectivity with useful interaction? How can evaluators further the capacity-building aims of these reforms?

DEFINING OUTCOMES AND INDICATORS OF PROGRESS

In many comprehensive, community-focused reforms, defining reform outcomes is a challenge facing participants and evaluators alike. For example, outcomes of the Trust Initiative can be seen variously as improving the delivery of services, as enhancing child development and family functioning, as mobilizing citizen investment and leadership, or as improving the quality of life in communities. An equally important issue is developing indicators that reflect progress toward meeting these outcomes -- for example, indicators that reflect the development of local leadership or the evolution of a collaborative decisionmaking capacity.

Each of the key stakeholders in community-focused initiatives needs to be able to account for the progress being made. For example, some community council members have been discouraged by apparently slow progress, often without being clear or comfortable about the standards to which they should be holding themselves or the programs funded through their planning efforts. Foundation Initiative staff monitor grantees' progress and face the challenge of defining and accounting for that progress to the Initiative Advisory Committee, and to the Trust's staff and Board. As documenters of the Initiative, Chapin Hall researchers struggle with understanding accomplishments made by Initiative communities in light of the original ideas on which the Initiative is based.

We have convened a group representing the stakeholders in the Trust Initiative to develop Initiative-wide benchmarks of progress and reasonable expectations for the time it will take to reach them. The group includes members of the Initiative's policymaking and resource-approval group (the Advisory Committee), members of the Trust staff, two representatives from each of the Initiative Community Councils, and members of the Chapin Hall documentation staff. This group is working to clarify and refine Initiative goals as well as develop the indicators of progress -- what might be seen, heard, or counted to indicate progress. This open and continuing discussion among participants, and the indicators once developed, will serve both to guide Initiative planning and to provide a shared framework for monitoring progress.

BALANCING OBJECTIVITY AND ENGAGEMENT

In observing and interviewing in communities, Chapin Hall's documentation staff have become

aware that Initiative participants frequently raise important questions about Initiative ideas and alternative ways of implementing them. We believe that our attempt to protect our objectivity as documenters by maintaining silence on such issues is both artificial and unproductive. We believe that it is desirable for evaluation staff to be available to engage in interactive discussion with community participants about the ideas that inform the Initiative and the challenges of its implementation. Therefore, we have designated one member of what are usually two-person evaluation teams in each community to respond to questions and raise issues about Initiative goals and strategies, while the other maintains the more traditional observer role. This more interactive stance gives participants an opportunity to clarify Initiative premises and discuss possible strategies with people who were involved in developing the premises but who are not involved in the proposal review and grant negotiation process. Even with the separation of idea development from proposal review, concerns about funding often influence the dialogue.

Others evaluating community initiatives are also seeking effective ways to provide ongoing feedback about the course of an initiative to communities and sponsors, and to be more engaged in discussing what the documentation suggests about the initiative's possible evolution. The Aspen Roundtable on Comprehensive Community-Based Initiatives focuses on this matter through a subgroup on evaluation. (A paper on evaluation prepared for the Roundtable is listed in "Related Chapin Hall Research" at the end of this paper.)

PROCESS OR OUTCOME EVALUATION?

While efforts to develop optimal evaluation strategies are in progress, we and others have had to make operational decisions about how best to understand and assess initiatives underway. Because the initiative in action will almost certainly differ from the proposed initiative on paper, it is critical to document what happens in relation to what was proposed. This process evaluation approach seems right for these initiatives, where, as noted, purposes are broad, complex, and evolving. Process evaluation is an effective tool for monitoring the development of ideas and their modification in practice. It can identify both opportunities and obstacles in implementation and provide feedback to stakeholders useful in informing the ongoing conduct of initiatives.

A complex issue facing the evaluation of community-focused initiatives is the question of when to undertake an outcome evaluation. Outcome evaluations are expensive in time and money and often impose interaction with an added group of outsiders on community participants. Seeking an outcome evaluation while an intervention is still being defined is likely to produce both disappointing and misleading results. An outcome evaluation that occurs too early will reveal what the investment to date has produced, not whether the fully accomplished infrastructure building can result in intended outcomes.

THE VALUE OF LEARNING FROM PROGRESS, OBSTACLES, AND EACH OTHER

One of the early overarching lessons we are learning is how important it is that the stakeholders in community-building initiatives find ways to contribute their diverse perspectives to the job of refining the initiative's goals and of using accomplishments and obstacles encountered to clarify strategies for reaching these goals. The need to learn from each other may seem obvious, but this happens too little, in part because there are tough issues involved in creating sufficiently open and ongoing opportunities for learning among community participants, sponsors, evaluators, and others.

UNDERSTANDING AND OPENNESS

To begin, there are differing perspectives on what learning is needed and what constitutes truth among the various stakeholders. Understanding the different orientations and agendas of the various actors, and how they fit together and when they fail to, is an essential first task. Better understanding what the stakeholders' organizational perspectives and mandates are can increase the chance that the strategies developed will incorporate the interests of the greatest number of involved parties, decreasing acrimony, increasing engagement, and enhancing the likelihood of success.

The act of learning in community-building efforts such as the Children, Youth, and Families Initiative has to be collaborative in its own right. However, there are real disincentives to honesty, especially given that access to significant financial resources is involved. Those who have the most to lose if they talk openly about purposes, agendas, or obstacles are those who have applied for or received funding. Applicants and grantees have been conditioned to focus on and report about success. It is often the case, however, that the best learning comes from an examination of difficulties: what is the trouble, why are we having it, how can it be solved? The opportunity and burden of creating a climate for mutual learning is likely to fall principally to the sponsors because they tend to have the greatest resources and authority. Sponsors are in a critical position to set both a tone and expectations that are conducive to learning.

METHODS AND MEANS

A number of routes to learning are possible, for single- or multi-site initiatives, as well as across initiatives -- meetings, work groups, topic-focused workshops, seminars, and site visits. Ideally, these events should involve the perspectives of all key stakeholders -- community participants, providers, sponsors, technical assistance providers, and evaluators -- on an equal footing.

In addition to these widely representative meetings, communication among those in the same position -- community residents with each other and funders with funders, for example -- is also important, to allow discussion of problems, issues, and lessons from a particular perspective and structural position in an initiative.

A real commitment to communication and learning requires that such events occur with some frequency. Infrequent opportunities to communicate make it likely that participants will offer only the party line and the good news. Repeated opportunities for a serious exchange of concerns can lead to truth-telling.

There are ways to supplement and sustain learning in addition to in-person exchanges. One way is to hire someone to collect information about what sites are doing, to identify current issues, key concerns, and promising approaches, and to disseminate that information to all stakeholders. The information superhighway, from the telephone to HandsNet to Internet, provides other options. In addition, evaluation, if used well, can further interactive learning.

Several factors add urgency to the need to learn from efforts in progress. There is, as this paper has frequently suggested, a broad and growing focus on community-based reforms in this country. Beyond that, there is a trend toward basing the delivery of, and to a lesser degree the decisionmaking for, services of all kinds in communities. This trend comes from impulses toward both economy and local control. In this time of tightened resources and changes in the landscape of social programs, the investments made in community-based initiatives and the results they achieve are especially critical, and likely to be closely scrutinized.

These investments in community-building are high-stakes endeavors for both communities and sponsors, and ultimately for all of us. We have an opportunity to use efforts underway to refine our thinking about what communities that support the development of children and the functioning of families look like and our understanding of how to generate and sustain the changes needed to create them.

A POSTSCRIPT

We took on the task of describing what we are learning from an initiative very much in progress, and in its early stages at that. Through the American Youth Policy Forum, we saw an opportunity to foster communication about these initiatives in a new and broader public policy arena. This is certainly in keeping with our advocacy for open communication within and across initiatives, in the interests of learning and progress.

Having laid out this vision of an infrastructure of services in communities -- its creation and character to date -- we end by asking your help in further examination. Does an infrastructure of the kind we envision make sense? Are there objections or obstacles to the basic infrastructure ideas or the learning strategy that we envision? How might such obstacles be overcome?

We would be pleased to know your responses to this report, as well as observations drawn from your own experiences. Chapin Hall is a member of the HandsNet national computer network, and manages an information forum devoted to discussing and supporting comprehensive initiatives for children, families, and communities. In addition to writing or calling, we encourage you to take advantage of this technology to share your thoughts with us and others in the field. If you are a HandsNet member already, please email either Rebecca Stone (Forum Manager, HN3025) or Joan Wynn (HN3573) with comments or questions. For more information about HandsNet's and Chapin Hall's Comprehensive Strategies Forum, please see the note at the end of this paper.

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RELATED CHAPIN HALL RESEARCH

Chapin Hall Center for Children at the University of Chicago is an independent research and development center dedicated to the study of issues affecting children. Chapin Hall focuses its efforts on monitoring the condition of children, facilitating the improved delivery of services to children in need, and seeking ways to foster the development of all children. The contexts in which children are supported -- primarily their families and communities -- are an area of particular interest.

All items listed are available from Chapin Hall.

The Availability and Use of Community Resources for Young Adolescents in an Inner-city and a Suburban Community by Julia Littell and Joan Wynn, 1989. Examines the resources available to youth in two different socioeconomic communities. The study identifies many differences in the range and types of community resources for youth and begins to explore the implications of these disparities. The benefits that may accrue to youth from the use of community resources are also explored.

Children, Families and Communities: A New Approach to Social Services by Joan Wynn, Joan Costello, Robert Halpern, and Harold A. Richman, 1993. Proposes building an infrastructure to support community-focused primary and specialized services for children and families.

The Children, Youth, and Families Initiative: An Eighteen-Month Review by Joan Wynn and Harold Richman, October 1992. The first major written report to the Chicago Community Trust from Chapin Hall on its documentation of the Initiative.

The Children, Youth, and Families Initiative: Annual Report by the Initiative documentation staff, May 1994. The second major report to the Chicago Community Trust on the progress of the Initiative, prepared and submitted approximately eighteen months after the first. However, with this document the reporting plan shifts to an annual basis, so this is also the first in a planned series of annual reports.

Comprehensive Community-Building Strategies: Issues and Opportunities for Learning by Rebecca Stone, May 1994. Prepared for the Rockefeller Foundation. Reflects an ongoing investigation of comprehensive, community-building strategies that informs the development of a computer-based discussion forum -- HandsNet's Comprehensive Strategies Forum (see note on HandsNet and the Forum at the end of this paper).

Creating a Consortium for the Education and Training of Children's Services Workers: The Need and Possible Approaches by Joan Costello and Renae Ogletree. Prepared at the Request of the Chicago Community Trust in Furtherance of Its Work under the Children, Youth, and Families Initiative. An exploration of the issues in training for child and youth workers, especially as these relate to the conceptual framework of the Children, Youth, and Families Initiative.

The Ford Foundation's Neighborhood and Family Initiative: Toward a Model of Comprehensive, Neighborhood-Based Development by Robert J. Chaskin, 1992. Discusses an initiative underway in four U.S. cities that employs community development strategies that recognize the interrelationship of social, physical, and economic development.

The Ford Foundation's Neighborhood and Family Initiative: Building Collaboration -- An Interim Report by Robert J. Chaskin and Renae Ogletree, 1993. Reviews the first two years of the initiative, examining how the principles elaborated in the first report have been interpreted and acted on within the four communities, and analyzes the impact of the NFI governing structure on the way the initiative has unfolded.

The Issue of Governance in Neighborhood-Based Initiatives by Robert J. Chaskin and Sunil Garg, 1994. Focuses on three issues relevant to the formation of local governance structures -- the relationship between neighborhood governance structures and local government; the nature of representation, and matters of legitimacy and connection; and long-term viability -- and reviews five comprehensive neighborhood-based initiatives in action in an effort to stimulate and inform debate about neighborhood development and local government.

Rethinking Child Welfare Services in Illinois: A Summary of Findings from The Children's Policy Project by Matthew W. Stagner, 1993. Presents a comprehensive study of the Illinois Department of Children and Family Services and proposes a new approach to child welfare that would create a comprehensive, community-based system of services available on a voluntary basis to all families in communities.

The Role of After-School Programs in the Lives of Inner-City Children by Robert Halpern, 1991. Through an analysis of a major Chicago youth agency, explores the purposes and content of after-school programs and their impact on the lives of inner-city youth.

"The Role of the Evaluator in Comprehensive Community Initiatives" by Prudence Brown. In *New Approaches to Evaluating Community Initiatives*, edited by James P. Connell, Anne C. Kubisch, Lisbeth B. Schorr, and Carol H. Weiss (pp. 201-225). Washington DC: The Aspen Institute, Roundtable on Comprehensive Community Initiatives for Children and Families, 1995. Explores how comprehensive community initiatives are challenging the traditional definition and role of the evaluator; it describes the wide and complex array of roles now available to evaluators, and analyzes how the evaluators' roles are being defined in practice, and with what consequences for learning and the success of these initiatives.

Sports and Recreation for Chicago Youth: Existing Services, Opportunities for Improvement by Diana Mendley Rauner, Laurence Stanton, and Joan Wynn, 1994. Focusing on the Chicago Public Schools and the Chicago Park District, documents the inadequacy of existing resources in sports and recreation for young people in Chicago, and attempts to identify ways to improve the quality and accessibility of these resources.

The Trust Quarterly, Spring 1991. In this issue of its quarterly publication, The Chicago Community Trust announced the commitment of $30 million to the Children, Youth, and Family Initiative, an ambitious effort to improve the lives of children and families.

COMPREHENSIVE STRATEGIES FORUM ON HANDSNET

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What are comprehensive community strategies, and where are they being tried? How do communities change? How do we know if human services reforms are working? What does community development have to do with children and families? Why is collaboration difficult? What are we learning from comprehensive community initiatives? Who provides funding in this area? How do we evaluate long-term change strategies? Who else is working in this area? How can I talk with them?

The Chapin Hall Center for Children at the University of Chicago manages the Comprehensive Strategies Forum on HandsNet. HandsNet is a computer-based information network designed to encourage and enhance information-sharing, communication, and collaboration among community-level practitioners, researchers, and policymakers concerned with issues of social welfare and policy reform.

The Comprehensive Strategies Forum is part of HandsNet's new area focus on Children, Youth and Families. The Forum provides a broad, in-depth look at innovative efforts to improve the lives of children and families through human services reform, community collaboration, economic development, and physical revitalization of communities. By including documents, data, and other information on the theoretical as well as the practical aspects of comprehensive reform efforts, the Forum provides both an opportunity and an impetus to integrate what's being learned from program implementation and research — activities that have been quite isolated historically.

The Comprehensive Strategies Forum includes information on current initiatives around the country, on collaboration, on how comprehensive initiatives are evaluated, the role of data and information systems in program development and cross-system efforts, private and public sources of funding for comprehensive strategies, current research on community-focused, comprehensive approaches for supporting children and families, and more. We welcome advice about what would make the Forum most useful to you and your organization or initiative.

In addition, the Comprehensive Strategies Forum engages a wide variety of individuals and organizations in pursuing larger questions about the nature of comprehensive endeavors, the need to explore diverse perspectives on comprehensiveness and community-based reform, and the usefulness of the concepts and lessons for social welfare policy. We hope you will want to be a part of this forum and contribute your own perspective, thoughts, experience, research, and writing to this rapidly expanding and dynamic field of inquiry and endeavor.

To learn more about the Comprehensive Strategies Forum or HandsNet, please contact Rebecca Stone at:

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